

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (previously presented) In a computer database adapted for use by one or more product component suppliers, a method of cataloguing components provided by said one or more product component suppliers and compatibility of said components with a plurality of products, including the steps of:

creating and modifying data relating to components specific to the one or more product component suppliers, said data including component identifiers for said components provided by said one or more product component suppliers,

creating and modifying a plurality of component groups, each component group containing component identifiers for one or more of said one or more product component suppliers' components of similar type,

creating and modifying one or more compatibility groups independently within each said components group,

creating and modifying associations between component identifiers and compatibility groups,

receiving product identifiers created by an external source and assigning each product identifier to a compatibility group within each component group, such that each compatibility group includes one or more product identifiers representing products with similar compatibilities within the respective components groups, and

providing a search tool whereby said database is queried by product identifier and component group to return one or more component identifiers compatible with the product represented by the product identifier.

2. (original) In a computer database adapted for use by an administrator and multiple product component suppliers, a method of cataloguing components provided by said multiple suppliers and compatibility of said components with a plurality of products, including the steps of:

providing each said supplier with access to a portion of data relating to components specific to that supplier, said data including component identifiers for said components provided by said supplier,

providing each said supplier with tools for creating and modifying a plurality of component groups, each component group containing component identifiers for one or more of said suppliers components of similar type,

creating product identifiers relating to products, and exporting said created product identifiers to said multiple suppliers,

providing each said supplier with tools for creating and modifying one or more compatibility groups independently within each said components group and for creating and modifying associations between component identifiers and compatibility groups,

said suppliers receiving said exported product identifiers and assigning each product to a compatibility group within each component group, such that each compatibility group includes one or more product identifiers representing products with similar compatibilities within the respective components groups,

said suppliers exporting said data portion as modified to said administrator,

consolidating said data portions received from said suppliers into said database, and

providing a search tool whereby said database is queried by product identifier and component group to return one or more component identifiers compatible with the product represented by the product identifier.

3. (original) A method according to claim 2 wherein said step of assigning a product to a compatibility group comprises assigning the product to an existing compatibility group, assigning the product to a new compatibility group or assigning the product to an unassigned compatibility group.

4. (previously presented) A database system for cataloguing components provided by one or more product component suppliers and compatibility of said components with a plurality of products, including:

a computer processor,

a database readable by said processor,

component and product data stored in said database, said data including a plurality of component identifiers divided into one or more component groups,

each component group including one or more compatibility groups containing product identifiers, and associations between said component identifiers and a compatibility group, and

a search tool queried by component identifier to return one or more product identifiers compatible with the component represented by the component identifier.

5. (original) A database system according to claim 4 wherein said component data includes data relating to components from multiple component suppliers.

6. (original) A database system according to claim 5 further including multiple supplier interfaces each allowing access to a part of the data relating to the components of the respective supplier, said supplier interfaces including tools for creating and modifying one or more compatibility groups independently within each said components group, for creating and modifying associations between component identifiers and compatibility groups, and for receiving exported product identifiers and assigning each product to a compatibility group within each component group, such that each compatibility group includes one or more product identifiers representing products with similar compatibilities within the respective components groups.

7. (original) A method according to claim 1 wherein said components are vehicle components and said product identifiers are vehicle details.

8. (original) A method according to claim 2 wherein said components are vehicle components and said product identifiers are vehicle details.

9. (original) A database system according to claim 4 wherein said components are vehicle components and said product identifiers are vehicle details.

10-20 (canceled)

21. (new) A method of building a computerized component knowledge database adapted for use by at least one component supplier, the database containing compatibility information relating to compatibility between at least one component in a component group and a corresponding compatibility group containing one or more product identifiers identifying one or more products compatible with the corresponding component, comprising:

establishing a component supplier's database including a component group field and a compatibility group field;

populating one or more component groups with component identifiers;

providing a standardized list of one or more product identifiers for assignment to one or more compatibility groups;

establishing an association between a compatibility group and a component identifier; and

allocating the product identifiers into one or more compatibility groups.

22. (new) A method as claimed in claim 21, wherein the establishing of associations between a compatibility group and a component is performed by a person, and wherein the person allocates the product identifiers into said one or more compatibility groups.

23. (new) A method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the person uses personal knowledge to assign product identifiers to a compatibility group and to establish an association between the compatibility group and a component.

24. (new) A method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the person uses an association tool to establish the association.

25. (new) A method as claimed in claim 25, wherein the association tool is a graphical user interface tool.

26. (new) A method as claimed in claim 21, wherein additional compatibility group product identifiers can be added to the list of product identifiers and added to one or more existing compatibility groups or to one or more new compatibility groups or to an unassigned group.

27. (new) A method as claimed in claim 21, wherein new component identifiers can be added to existing component groups or added to new component groups.

28. (new) A method as claimed in claim 21, wherein the database includes a search tool to identify at least one component from a product identifier and a component group.

29. (new) A method as claimed in claim 21, wherein a central administrator provides standardized product identifiers to each component supplier.

30. (new) A method as claimed in claim 21, wherein the compatibility groups include an unassigned group without an association to a specific component.

31. (new) A method as claimed in claim 21, wherein the component groups are standardized.

32. (new) A method as claimed in claim 21, wherein the standardized list is supplied by an external source.

33. (new) A method of building a computerized component knowledge database adapted for use by an administrator and plurality of component suppliers, the database containing information relating to specific associations between components in component group and products of a compatibility group, the components being supplied by one or more component suppliers, the database including a component group field and a compatibility group field, the method comprising:

providing each supplier with access to a supplier-specific data portion of a database relating to components specific to that supplier;

creating a list of compatibility product identifiers;

providing each supplier with tools for creating a plurality of component groups;

whereby the supplier is enabled to populate one or more component groups with component identifiers;

providing each supplier with tools for creating one or more compatibility groups, whereby one or more compatibility groups are populated with product identifiers;

providing each supplier with tools for creating associations between component identifiers of that supplier and compatibility groups created by that supplier, the association between a compatibility group and a component identifier indicating compatibility between a component and products of the compatibility group;

exporting the supplier-specific data portion of the database to the administrator; and

consolidating the data portions from each supplier into a consolidated database.

34. (new) A method as claimed in claim 33, wherein interchangeable components are associated with a corresponding compatibility group.

35. (new) A method as claimed in claim 33 including: providing a search tool whereby the database is searchable to locate one or more component identifiers using a product identifier and a component group as the search criteria.

36. (new) A method as claimed in claim 35, wherein the product identifier and the component group locate a compatibility group, and wherein the component identifier is located by the association between the compatibility group and the component identifier.